

Church Seasons

The Episcopal Church finds its daily rhythms through the seasons of the Church. You may notice the colors of the liturgical garments and hanging change throughout the year. These colors reflect the changing of the seasons.

Advent (*blue or purple*) begins the church year on the fourth Sunday before Christmas. Advent is a time of expectancy and waiting.

Christmas (*white*) celebrates the birth of our Lord

Epiphany (*white*) celebrates Jesus' manifestation to all nations in the coming of the Wise Men and in His baptism.

Lent (*purple*) a time of penance, to prepare for Easter

Holy Week (*red*) remembers Jesus' passion, death and burial.

Easter (*white*) celebrates Christ's resurrection and includes the Great Fifty Days, the Ascension, and the Day of Pentecost

Pentecost (*red*) The day the Holy Spirit descended upon the disciples.

Season after Pentecost (*green*) Also called "ordinary time" commemorates the Spirit's leading and teaching the Church

Structure

The structure of the Episcopal Church is similar to a pyramid. At its base are the approximate 7500 congregations that form the grass-roots. Going up the pyramid are the 109 dioceses, the geographic units of which each congregation is a part. A bit further up the pyramid are the nine provinces, the geographic units of which each diocese is a part. At the top is the national church with all of its departments and programs that offer support to all of those entities that make up the pyramid. In many respects it is an inverted pyramid. The congregations are really at the top and create the need for each of the structures beneath them.



Since 1940, the Episcopal Church has had its own flag. Its colors are red, white & blue signifying that it is American. The St. George's cross signifies relationship with the Church of England. Nine white crosses are arranged in a canon of blue. These signify the nine original American dioceses and indicate that our first bishop was consecrated in Scotland .



GENERAL INFORMATION

about the

EPISCOPAL CHURCH

in the

USA

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WHAT IS THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH?

The Episcopal Church is one of the 28 independent, self-governing Churches that make up the Anglican Communion. These churches, while autonomous in their governance, are bound together by tradition, Scripture, and the inheritance they have received from the Church of England. The Anglican Communion is headed spiritually by the Archbishop of Canterbury and has almost 80 million members, making it the second largest Christian body in the world.

The Episcopal Church came into existence as an independent denomination after the American Revolution. Today it has between two and three million members in the United States, Mexico, and Central America, all under the spiritual leadership of the Presiding Bishop.

Bishops in the American Episcopal Church are elected by individual dioceses and are consecrated into the Apostolic Succession, considered to witness to an unbroken line of Church leadership beginning with the Apostles themselves. For nearly three decades the American Episcopal Church has ordained women to the priesthood. In 1988 the Diocese of Massachusetts elected the first Anglican woman bishop, Barbara Harris.

The faith of the Episcopal Church has its roots in the historic Creeds (Nicene Creed & Apostles' Creed), the Scriptures (Old & New Testaments), the Sacraments (Baptism & Eucharist), and the historic episcopate (described above). Eucharist (communion) is the central act of worship, and is celebrated at least once weekly. Because the church values reason and dialogue with fields of secular study, some latitude in interpretation of doctrine has been normative. Thus, equal stress is placed on beliefs, tradition, and the use of the *Book of Common Prayer* in public worship. This book, first published in the 16th century, even in its revisions, stands today as a major source of unity for Anglicans around the world.

History

The Episcopal Church in the United States traces its roots to the early English settlers who arrived in America and formed congregations grounded in the traditions and liturgy of the Church of England. Although the first bishop, Samuel Seabury, was consecrated after the Revolutionary War in 1784, the Episcopal Church was not officially organized until 1785 in Philadelphia. In 1789, the Church adopted a constitution, canons, and a Book of Common Prayer based on that of the Church of England. In 1821, the Church was incorporated as The Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America. It retains that title to this day, and its name reflects the importance of the English missionaries, who founded and spread the Church throughout this continent.

COMMON QUESTIONS:

Are you a Protestant Church?

Yes. The word *protestant* began as a derogatory term used for those who were protesting abuses in the church of that day. The word also means "to witness for" and reminds us that our church witnesses for Jesus in the world around us. As a Protestant Church we are not in communion with the Roman Catholic Church, though we wish to work for greater unity among all Christians and churches. We believe that through a relationship with Jesus as our forgiver and leader that we come to salvation.

Are you a catholic Church?

Yes. The word catholic was described hundreds of years ago as "*that which has been believed in all places, at all times, by all people.*" The word catholic means what has always been believed as the essentials of Christian faith and practice. We are *not* a part of the Roman Catholic Church, but we do strive to welcome their members into full communion with us. More importantly, as a catholic church we believe there is a great value to the long-standing traditions and practices of Christians throughout time. Among the central practices of a catholic church are the Sacraments.

Are you a Sacramental Church?

Yes. A sacrament is an outward and visible sign of the inward and spiritual gifts God offers us. We accept as most important the sacraments of Baptism and the Holy Eucharist (also called Communion or The Lord's Supper). In Baptism we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit and are adopted into God's family called the Church. In Eucharist, we receive the bread and wine of communion which we believe is the body and blood of Jesus -- a way of knowing by faith that Jesus is truly with us and in union (communion) with us at that point in time.

Are you a Bible Church?

Yes. The Bible is a book that allows us to hear God's words to his people and their response to him. We believe that all things you need for faith and salvation are in the Bible. There's no secret knowledge you need outside of the Bible, and no additional truth that came later that is of the same value as the words of the Bible. We also believe God has given us a mind, and wants us to use it, as we struggle to interpret, understand and apply the stories and teachings in the Bible.